

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRMAN TOM WHEELER**

Re: *October 17, 2014 Commission Open Meeting 911 Outage Presentation.*

Promoting public safety is the Commission's most fundamental responsibility. Our founding statute says it's our job to "promot[e] the safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communications."

Public safety is also a central pillar of the Network Compact – the set of principles that has defined the relationship between those who build and operate networks and those who use them.

Robust, accessible 911 service is central to our public safety mission.

As today's presentation makes clear, the transition to all-IP communications raises new challenges for 911.

We are used to thinking about 911 outages as a result of acts of nature – a hurricane, a tornado, vast flooding – that damage local equipment with localized impact.

But there is a new threat. The emerging Next Generation 911 system is more complex than the legacy 911 system and relies more extensively on infrastructure, resources, and relationships that are multistate or national in scope. It is supported by a larger number of service providers, including new entrants that are offering new, niche functionalities.

Innovation is good, and we want NG 911 to support new forms of emergency communications.

But the creation of new, complex technologies with a broader universe of operational relationships also has introduced new potential vulnerabilities that need to be addressed if we are going to have a reliable and resilient 911 system.

As we just heard, this past April, we experienced one of the most extensive 911 outages to date.

For about six hours, more than 11 million consumers throughout Washington state and portions of California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina lacked the ability to make 911 calls.

About 6,600 calls to 911 went unanswered.

The outage was not caused by a storm or disaster. Nor was there a failure of the local telecommunications provider's network. The outage was traced to a preventable technical problem in a third party vendor's equipment used to route 911 calls on behalf of the primary telecommunications provider.

We have seen similar problems in other instances.

Again, IP-based technologies can and have introduced wonderful new functionalities for public safety communities. And IP-based technologies can also dramatically lower operating costs by enabling consolidation.

But we cannot undertake this transition and only worry about cost containment; we cannot move forward without the parties understanding their responsibilities to the American public. The reliability and integrity of 911 has to be the top priority. Implementing IP-based solutions without taking into account potential vulnerabilities is a recipe for disaster.

We need a better understanding of the risks involved, and how to mitigate them to ensure that reliable access to 911 is preserved. That is why the Public Safety Bureau's work on today's report is so important. And that is why, as technologies evolve, we must work with our state and local government partners as well as the industry to ensure that reliable access to 911 is preserved.